

# THE BEST-KNOWN MEN IN TOWN

## The Black Presence at Perth 1816-1926

When Perth's only Black citizen died in 1926, the local newspaper observed that the town had lost one of its "*outstanding characters ... there was nothing black about [him] except his skin, otherwise he was white through and through*".

Appalling as that sentiment may seem in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the *Perth Courier* editor<sup>1</sup> was, in fact, attempting to convey the community's high regard for John S. Jackson. When Jackson came to Perth, social, moral and cultural superiority began with simply being born White, Anglo-Saxon and Protestant. To be anything but a WASP was to face a very high bar to achieving merit and social acceptance (as Catholic Irish immigrants could well attest). What the subject of the *Courier's* eulogy might have thought of such praise can only be guessed at, but having lived at Perth for 52 years, he was no doubt accustomed to being measured by such a yardstick.

Remarkably, perhaps, although Jackson and his wife had been the sole representatives of their race at Perth for half a century, they were not the first Blacks to make the community their home.

### Peter Zamphere & John Hall

However briefly, the settlement's founding population included at least two Black soldier-settlers, Peter Zamphere<sup>2</sup>, a Drummer of the 49<sup>th</sup> Foot, and John Hall, a Private of the 104<sup>th</sup> Foot.<sup>3</sup> The former was ticketed for Bathurst C-7/L-19(W) in July 1816 and the latter for Bathurst C-12/L-16(E) in June 1817. Both had been born in the West Indies and both were unmarried men. Like more than half of the soldier-settlers, Black or White, Zamphere disappeared from his lot within a few months, moving to Montreal to seek medical treatment for old wounds, never to return. He married a 16-year-old 'colored' girl named Charlotte Meunir (aka Charlotte Thain) in 1819 and lived at Sorel, Quebec.<sup>4</sup> Hall likewise disappeared from the Perth area without completing his settlement duties, departing for a destiny unknown.

### Black Sam

Through the 1830s Perth was home to at least one man of color, 'Black Sam'. An account, written three decades later, described him as "*a poor and lonely negro, who had escaped from bondage and found his way to the cold north*"<sup>5</sup>, but nothing of his background and little of his life at Perth is known for certain.

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<sup>1</sup> *Perth Courier*, April 9, 1926. Who, specifically, wrote the obituary is uncertain. In 1926 the *Perth Courier* was published/edited jointly by James M. Walker and William T. Walker.

<sup>2</sup> Zamphere was born in 1776 at Santo Domingo, in what is today the Dominican Republic. He enlisted in May 1796 and served 29 years until his discharge in June 1815.

<sup>3</sup> Nineteenth century British Army regulations officially restricted the recruitment of Black soldiers to anything but a few all-Black regiments. Never-the-less, it was a point of pride in regular line regiments to have Black musicians, Drummers in particular. Hall may have been a drummer as well, but the Pioneers of the 104<sup>th</sup> Foot, one per company (10 men in total) were all black as well.

<sup>4</sup> *Done With Slavery: The Black Fact in Montreal 1760-1840*, by Frank Macky (2010) ISBN 978-077-353-5787.

<sup>5</sup> *Perth Courier*, January 24, 1866, 'Recollections of the Ferry Road' by an author who signed himself/herself only as 'Mac'.

Whatever his backstory, if taken at face value the surviving evidence would suggest that Black Sam was active in the politics of Upper Canada, seeking to represent Lanark County in the Legislative Assembly in four successive elections – 1828, 1830, 1834 and 1836.

In its edition of October 3, 1834, the *Bathurst Courier & Ottawa Gazette* published an appeal “*To the Free and Independent Electors of the County of Lanark*”

*... I am desirous of obtaining the distinguished honour of sitting as your Representative in the Provincial Parliament ... On former occasion I solicited your support and had every assurance of success; but the persuasion of false friends, and the intrigues of real enemies, induced me, in a moment of folly, to barter your interest and my own honor, by passively relinquishing all claim to your suffrages.*

*I am Gentlemen, as every man ought to be, a REFORMER, ... Unsolicited I come forward to ask your support, and court the most rigid enquiry of my private life.*

*I will only add, in conclusion, that should you think proper to select me as one of your representatives, I will cast a low colour upon the face of things.*

*I beg the honour of being,  
Your humble & devoted servant,  
BLACK SAM*

Over the signature of Samuel Black he reappears in the run-up to the election of June 1836 when his appeal for voter support promised “*unceasing anxiety for the prosperity of the country*” and pointed to

*... the manifest deficiencies in the complexion of the various candidates who have hitherto declared themselves ... In presenting myself to your notice I tender my unqualified disappropriation of your conduct in having rejected me, almost unanimously, at three successive elections<sup>6</sup> ... No exertion shall be spared on my part to promote my own interest and that of the County in which I have been so long a respectable inhabitant ...*

*I subscribe myself,  
Gentlemen,  
Samuel Black.<sup>7</sup>*

Although this was a paid advertisement in its pages, the *Bathurst Courier* commented elsewhere in the same edition that among those contesting the upcoming election there was “*a person by the name of ‘Samuel Black’ with whose respectable self we have not had the ‘honour’ of being acquainted*”.

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<sup>6</sup> The previous elections had been held in July 1828, October 1830 and October 1834.

<sup>7</sup> *Bathurst Courier*, February 19, 1836.

If these were, in fact, campaign messages published by Black Sam, at the very least they undermine the escaped slave story. The notices would suggest that he had benefited from some degree of education, at least to the extent of being literate, and would also mean that he was a British subject and met the property ownership requirements<sup>8</sup> of the day qualifying him to vote and to seek election. None of those things seem very likely for a runaway slave.

As neither Black Sam or Samuel Black attracted a single vote or even appeared on the hustings at any of the four elections between 1828 and 1836, it must be assumed that the *Bathurst Courier* notices were a hoax. A poor Black man seems to have been used in a supposedly humorous, but cruel and racist effort by opponents to discredit the Reform party by reference to his “low colour” and the comparative “manifest deficiencies in the complexion” of his Tory competitors.

The reality of Black Sam’s decade or more at Perth was probably quite different, however. Less than four months after he was supposedly a candidate for elected office, he was jailed for stealing food.

*On Sunday last, a colored man, commonly known here by the name of ‘Black Sam’, was apprehended and committed to the care and safe-keeping of Mr. James Young, the jailor, being suspected of having stolen on the evening previous a quantity of pork, mutton and cabbage from an out-building of Mr. P. T. Murdock, butcher.*<sup>9</sup>

Although the exact date is unknown, Black Sam died sometime around 1840. He “committed suicide, by hanging himself on a tree” about 3½ miles south of Perth near what is now the intersection of the Rideau Ferry and Elmgrove Roads. “The unfortunate man found himself in a community that had no use for him and doubtless put an end to his life rather than go back to the more genial climate where he would be in slavery”.<sup>10</sup>

For the next decade there is little evidence of any Blacks living at Perth. There were probably visits from time to time by itinerant pedlars or tradesmen, or an occasional performance by travelling American minstrel shows, but the only evidence that Blacks might have been resident in the town or vicinity appears in a curious quarter. On August 23, 1850, the *Perth Courier* published the following Sons of Temperance notice;

*Mr. Editor - by inserting in your paper the following Resolutions, which were unanimously agreed to [at] a meeting of the Perth Division No. 12, S. of T. [Sons of Temperance Lodge], located in this place, you will be conferring a favor upon all who are of opinion that all colors of men are entitled to the same privileges. – Perth Division, S. of T.*

*August 12, 1850. Moved by Bro. M. McDonnell, seconded by Bro. John Campbell -*

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<sup>8</sup> The right to vote in Upper Canada in 1830 was available to any British subject over the age of 20 years, owning rural property worth 40s, or urban property worth £5, or residents of the village for at least one year, paying rent of £10 annually.

<sup>9</sup> *Bathurst Courier*, October 28, 1836.

<sup>10</sup> *Perth Courier*, January 24, 1866, ‘Recollections of the Ferry Road’ by an author who signed himself/herself only as ‘Mac’.

*Resolved--That whereas this Division has learned, that, at a late session of the National Division, it was resolved, that "it is improper and illegal to admit into our Order persons of color," and whereas we, the members of this Division cannot recognize the authority of any resolution that would exclude "persons of color" from equal rights and privileges with us, we feel it to be our duty to protest against the intention to "obligate" us to defer to the prejudices of parties in the United States who mawkishly and unchristianly exclude "persons of Color" from their society; and we herewith instruct our Recording Scribe to forward our protest with the subjoined resolutions, at his earliest convenience, to the Grand Scribe of the Grand Division of Canada, to be communicated to the National Division.*

*Resolved--That this Division recognizes the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the highest authority in regard to the principles by which our Order ought to be actuated.*

*Resolved--That those Scriptures, without excepting "persons of color", declare, that, if we have no respect to persons, we commit sin. James ii, 9.*

*Resolved--That the usages of society, having the approbation of the author of those Scriptures, did not exclude "persons of color" from preferment, but admitted them to perfect equality with the fairest; which is satisfactorily proved by Jeremiah xxxviii, 7, 8, &c., and Acts viii, 27, and other portions.*

*Resolved--That those Scriptures declare that "He who giveth life and breath, and all things, hath made of one blood all nations of men"; which is abundantly proved by all the results of intercourse between several races.*

*Resolved--That we, therefore, will welcome to our brotherhood, as heartily as we will a white person, every "person of color," who will renounce the use of intoxicating drinks, and will pledge himself to be sober and industrious, and to continue faithfully to the obligations of our Order to maintain the principles of "Love, Purity and Fidelity".*

The Perth Temperance Society's integration resolutions of 1850 probably did not represent a response to local Blacks clamoring for membership.<sup>11</sup> More likely, the Perth chapter was making a statement of religious principle and political independence from the United States.

The 'Sons of Temperance of North America' was founded in 1842 in New York City and the 'National Division' headquartered there presumed to impose its constitution and rules through a publication called *The Blue Book, for the Use of Subordinate Divisions*. The *Blue Book* prohibited Black membership.<sup>12</sup> Perth Division No. 12, S. of T., however, was led by clergymen who regarded themselves and the membership at large as 'subordinate' to the Bible, not the *Blue Book*.<sup>13</sup> Also, as British Subjects, at a time when Britain was leading the effort to stamp out slavery, there was a strong reluctance to "*defer to the prejudices of parties in the United States*".

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<sup>11</sup> Even if there were tea-total Blacks living at Perth and interested in becoming a 'Brother', the Sons of Temperance was expensive. The initiation fee alone was equivalent to the weekly salary of a working man, and the membership fee was another nickel a week.

<sup>12</sup> Even the first attempt, in 1844, to create a segregated Black Sons of Temperance was voted down by the National Division. Blacks were not granted their own lodge until after the civil war. Most lodges were integrated in the 1880s.

<sup>13</sup> National Division rules also barred women from membership in the Temperance Society, but the worthies of Perth No. 12, S. of T., raised no objection to that rule. Women were not admitted to membership until 1866.

## Edward H. Brown

Edward H. Brown first appears at Perth in the summer of 1853 operating a “*Shaving, Hair-Cutting and Champoning Saloon*” located opposite the Market Square. Brown was Black<sup>14</sup> and was born in the United States in about 1811. He was unmarried but appears to have been accompanied by one female family member<sup>15</sup>, perhaps a sister or a daughter.



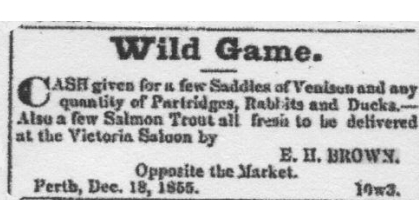
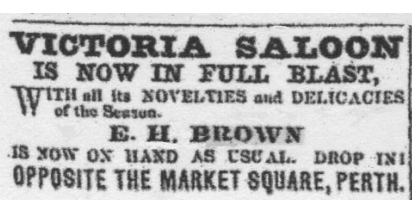
By December 1854 Brown was host of the ‘Victoria Saloon’, an establishment very much in the American style as compared to the traditional Canadian tavern. He advertised his business as,

*... just the place to get oysters (fried, stewed and scalloped), lobster soup, sauce and salad, sardines, sandwiches, codfish, chowder. A choice cup of coffee or cocoa. Also, a prime cigar and the latest news! Drop in and you will find Brown on hand as usual.*<sup>16</sup>

*Plantagenet Water*<sup>17</sup> – Regularly received by express, fresh and sold by the pint, quart or gallon, at the Victoria Saloon<sup>18</sup>.

Within a year the Victoria Saloon was replaced by, or expanded into, the ‘E. H. Brown Variety Store’.

*Where will be found always on hand – fine Razors, Strops, Brushes, Soap, Choice Perfumes, Hair Oils and Hair Dyes. Splendid Wigs, Curls, Fronts and Moustaches! Beautiful Shirts, Collars, Scarfs, Ties, Suspenders, Handkerchiefs, Gloves. Extra kinds of Hair Restorative, viz: Phalan’s, Lyon’s, Bogles and Browns. A comical lot of Toys, Yankee Notions, Fancy Jewelry, Pictures &c. Superior brands of Segars, Fancy Pipes, Fine Cut Tobacco, Snuff and Boxes. Nice Fruits, Confectionaries, Sauces, Pickles., Preserved Lobsters, Sardines, Capers, Vermicelli, Curry Powders and a great many other “Knick-Knacks” too tedious to mention. Shaving and Hair Cutting done as usual. E. H. Brown will be happy to see his old friends, home and abroad, at his new spot in front of the old spot, opposite the Market Square, Gore Street, Perth.*<sup>19</sup>



<sup>14</sup> Enumerated as ‘Mulatto’ in the 1861 census.

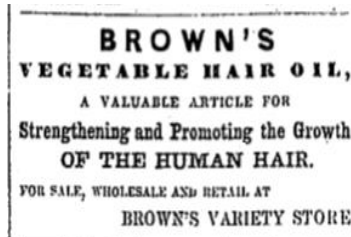
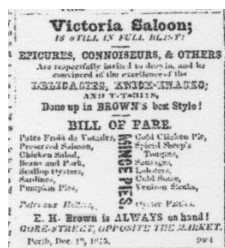
<sup>15</sup> As recorded in the 1861 census.

<sup>16</sup> *Perth Courier*, October-December 1858.

<sup>17</sup> Medicinal water taken from a spring at Plantagenet, Ontario. According to the *British American Medical & Physical Journal*, Vol-7, August 1850, Plantagenet Water had a very high sodium content, and also contained potassium, calcium, magnesium, lime, iron, silica and carbonic acid.

<sup>18</sup> *Perth Courier* advertisement published July 1<sup>st</sup> through 16<sup>th</sup> September 1859.

<sup>19</sup> *Perth Courier*, January 13 – March 30, 1860.



Like the Black men who followed him, Brown was principally a barber, although his other pursuits may have taken precedence. Among the many products offered at the Brown Variety Store was at least one item of his own creation. 'Brown's Vegetable Hair Oil', designed to promote growth and the strengthening of human hair, was available at both wholesale and retail prices.

Edward H. Brown was in business at Perth for about eight years. His original barber shop was advertised from August 1853. After the 'Victoria Saloon' project, dating from 1854, his 'Variety Store' advertisements ran in the *Perth Courier* from January 1856 through September 1859. In May 1860 he was among those who contributed to a subscription "for the benefit of the widow *Dennison*"<sup>20</sup>. In the April 1861 census he was enumerated as a single man, living with one female family member, in a single family, two storey, frame house. Brown seems to disappear from Perth sometime later that year.

### George Gilbert & Caroline Lawrie

George Gilbert, accompanied by his White wife, Caroline Lawrie/Laurie, and two 'Colored' children, arrived at Perth in late 1858. Not only was the Gilbert marriage 'mixed' racially, but George adhered to the Methodist Church<sup>21</sup> while Caroline was a Roman Catholic, and George was an English-speaking American while Caroline was a francophone Quebecois.

George Gilbert was born at or near the village of Fairfield, Herkimer County, New York, USA in about 1835, the son of Peter and Margaret Gilbert. Where or when Peter Gilbert was born is unknown, but he died, apparently in Herkimer County, in about 1836. Margaret Gilbert was born in neighboring Montgomery County c1808<sup>22</sup> and must have married Peter around 1825. George Gilbert was the youngest of their three sons, preceded by Andrew, born c1828 and Hiram born c1834.

Census takers classified Peter as 'Colored', Margaret as 'Mulatto', Andrew as 'Black', Hiram as 'Mulatto' and George as 'Mulatto'. New York State passed legislation ending slavery in 1799, but the law was so constructed that those already enslaved remained so for the remainder of their lives, and children born to slave mothers were required to work for their mother's master as indentured servants until their late twenties. It was not until 1827 that all remaining slaves in the State were finally freed. Nevertheless, the Gilbert family, including parents Peter and Margaret who were born nearly a quarter century before slavery was fully abolished, were born free.

<sup>20</sup> *Perth Courier*, May 25, 1860. Mrs. Anne Dennison had been widowed at some earlier date. The collection of funds for her assistance was prompted by the death of her son, and sole support, David Dennison. The employee of a local pharmacy, David had been burned "in a most shocking manner" and died in "excruciating agony" when, in the process of boiling-off a bottle of alcohol, the vapor ignited and "exploded like gunpowder" (*Perth Courier* April 20, 1860).

<sup>21</sup> At Rome, NY, George was a Methodist but later, in the Canadian census, reported himself a Presbyterian.

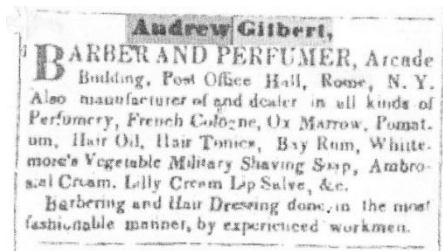
<sup>22</sup> She appears to have died in Illinois in the 1880s.

Peter Gilbert's occupation is also unknown, but he enjoyed some prosperity and left his widow and children in comfortable circumstances. In addition to whatever property Margaret may have inherited from Peter, in 1837, the year after he died, she purchased land in her own name at Fairfield and then in 1841 and 1854 sold plots at a profit. The 1850 census shows Margaret to be the owner of \$1,200 in real property, increasing to \$1,800 in 1855. By 1875 she operated a 'Huckster Shop'<sup>23</sup>, owned a house valued at \$4,000 and employed a White servant.

In about 1848<sup>24</sup> the Gilberts, mother and sons, moved to Rome, Oneida County, New York, where, by that year<sup>25</sup>, 20-year-old Andrew Gilbert had established a barber shop and was advertising his services in the local newspaper;

*Andrew Gilbert - Barber and Perfumer, Arcade Building, Post Office Hall, Rome, N.Y. Also manufacturer of and dealer in all kinds of Perfumery, French Cologne, Ox Marrow, Pomatum, Hair Oil, Hair Tonics, Bay Rum, Whitemore's Vegetable Military Shaving Soap, Ambrosial Cream, Lilly Cream, Lip Salve, &c. Barbering and Hair Dressing done in the most fashionable manner by experienced workmen.*<sup>26</sup>

At Rome, the Gilberts were active in, and apparent leaders of, their local church. Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church was located on the northeast corner of Depeyster and Lawrence Streets and described on an 1850s map of Rome as the "Colored People's Church". The church was built between about 1848 and 1851 under the leadership of Reverend Daniel H. Peterson. Shortly after completing the church project, Reverend Peterson left its pulpit to work on behalf of the American Colonization Society (ACS)<sup>27</sup> scheme to settle free American Blacks in Liberia, West Africa. In October or November 1852 Margaret Gilbert and her sons George and Hiram were among signatories to an attestation vouching for Peterson as he undertook fundraising in support of the Liberian venture.



*TO ALL WHOM THIS MAY CONCERN: We, colored citizens of Rome, State of New-York, do hereby certify, that the Rev. D. H. Peterson has, for the last three years, been employed in erecting a Church at Rome, which he has fully accomplished. We now have a comfortable, neat house of worship, all paid for, and balance over. We found him faithful, and perfectly honest in his undertaking. We, therefore, cheerfully recommend him to all. — Thomas Johnson, Samuel Debois, Wm. Johnson, Stephen Thompson, George Gilbert, Hiram Gilbert, Margaret Gilbert.*<sup>28</sup>

<sup>23</sup> A small shop or stall selling small articles.

<sup>24</sup> The 1855 New York State census records that Margaret Gilbert had been living in Rome for six years.

<sup>25</sup> *Our City and its People - A Descriptive Work on The City of Rome, New York*, Edited by: Daniel E. Wagner, The Boston History Company, Publishers, 1896.

<sup>26</sup> *Rome Citizen*, July 1849.

<sup>27</sup> Officially named 'The Society for the Colonization of Free People of Color of America', beginning in 1816 the ACS settled about 13,000 American Blacks in Liberia.

<sup>28</sup> *The Looking-Glass: Being a True Report and Narrative of the Life, Travels, and Labors of the Rev. Daniel H. Peterson, a Colored Clergyman; Embracing a Period of Time from the Year 1812 to 1854, and Including His Visit to Western Africa Peterson*, by Daniel H. Peterson (1854)

While vouching for Peterson's character as "*faithful and perfectly honest*", the Gilberts' endorsement did not extend to his work on behalf of the ACS. Resolutions of a "*Convention of Colored Persons*", held at Bethel AME Church in Rome on May 10, 1853, at which Hiram Gilbert served as secretary<sup>29</sup>, described the ACS as, "*a society that the colored man should dread more than the sword, pestilence or famine*" exerting an influence "*most pernicious in its effects upon us, by fostering prejudice and intolerance*" and an organization looked upon "*with unmitigated loathing and contempt, and worthy only of our unqualified condemnation*". The convention resolved that "*the colored people of the United States [should] remain in this country until driven from it by the point of a bayonet, and then not until death*" because "*as American born citizens, we have a right to a home upon American soil, and that we prefer to remain here and endure the ills we have, [rather] than fly to others we know naught of*".<sup>30</sup>

Many free Blacks like the Gilberts saw the ACS as an unholy marriage of convenience between northern abolitionists and southern slave owners; the former believing that Blacks could only achieve true freedom in Africa and the latter seeing Liberia as a means to avoid slave rebellions by removing free blacks from slave societies. The ACS executive was largely composed of white men from the slaving-holding southern states. However, as it would mean the removal of Blacks from Rome, the local newspaper thought Reverend Peterson's plans well worth support.

*We are greatly gratified to learn that Mr. Peterson proposes to engage in a work which promises to be of great service to his race ... To enable him to perform his work funds are necessary and he has been advised to appeal in the first instance to the citizens of Rome. Believing as we do that Mr. Peterson is worthy of confidence, and that he is engaged in the most beneficial labor for his race in which he could possibly embark, we commend him to our citizens, and trust they will feel pleasure in aiding him.*<sup>31</sup>

Andrew Gilbert was neither a signatory to the Peterson attestation, nor a participant in the anti-ACS convention. He had died, at Rome, aged 24 years, in September of 1852<sup>32</sup>. Even though both of his brothers were barbers, neither took over Andrew's shop in the Rome Arcade. Instead, at about this time (1853-1854)<sup>33</sup>, both went looking for new opportunities, Hiram to nearby Utica, Oneida County<sup>34</sup> (he later moved to Illinois), and George to Ogdensburg, St. Lawrence County<sup>35</sup> (before moving to Canada). The financial resources left by their father Peter, and husbanded by their mother Margaret, no doubt made it possible for Hiram and George, aged only about 19 and 20 years of age, to finance the start-up of their own businesses.

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<sup>29</sup> In addition to Hiram Gilbert, other signatories to Rev. Peterson's attestation of 1852 were also prominent at the 1853 convention; Thomas Johnson (b.1825) put forward the motion appointing one John Wandall of Schenectady President, and William Johnson (b.1798) was appointed Convention Vice President. The Johnson men were also both barbers by trade and appear to be a father and son.

<sup>30</sup> *Rome Daily Sentinel*, May 16, 1853.

<sup>31</sup> *Rome Daily Sentinel*, December 3, 1852.

<sup>32</sup> He left a widow, Catharine L. Blackledge. He also had a daughter who pre-deceased him.

<sup>33</sup> They were no longer living in Rome in the 1855 State Census.

<sup>34</sup> Hiram was recorded living in Utica in the 1860 Federal Census. He moved to Salem, Knox County, Illinois, where he married Libbie Dunning in 1869. He may have died at Chicago in 1896.

<sup>35</sup> George is not documented in Ogdensburg until early 1855 – by an Ogdensburg Post Office notice of unclaimed letters, published in the *St. Lawrence Republican*, May 29, 1855.

When George and Hiram left Rome, the community's Black population was already very small and getting smaller. The 1850 census recorded only 116 Blacks, 69 adults and 47 children, among a total population of about 3,500 (3.3%). Then, between 1855 and 1860 the Black population rapidly declined, by 49 individuals, from 127 to 78 (nearly 40%).<sup>36</sup> This exodus might have been the result of the economic depression that gripped the U.S. in the latter part of the decade, but the enthusiasm expressed by the *Rome Daily Sentinel* for Reverend Peterson's Liberian dream, might also suggest that Blacks were not particularly welcome in Rome of the 1850s. The Gilbert men were among those moving on, but their mother continued to live in Rome for another two decades. The 1857 Rome City Directory listed "*Gilbert, Margaret, widow h. George n. Court*" (i.e. resident in a house on North George Street near the intersection of Court Street). In 1864 the directory listed her as "*Gilbert, Margaret, widow of Peter, h.102, James Street*". She was still living in Rome in 1875, but by 1880 had moved to Illinois.<sup>37</sup>

In 1853 or 1854, at about the time George Gilbert was establishing himself as a barber in Ogdensburg, he married Caroline Lawrie/Laurie. The details of Caroline's background are uncertain. The Canadian census<sup>38</sup> enumerated her as French, born c1837 in Canada East (Quebec), and the registration of her son George Henry's 1880 marriage gives her maiden name as Lawrie. Although unproven, circumstantial evidence suggests that she may have been the daughter of Joseph Laurie and Christine Tremblé<sup>39</sup>, baptized on July 6, 1836 in Les Éboulements, Quebec, on the north bank of the St. Lawrence River, 70 miles (114 Kilometers) downstream from Quebec City.<sup>40</sup> Where the marriage took place has not been determined, but that George could have met and married Caroline at Ogdensburg, on visits across the river to Brockville, Canada West (Ontario), or on business trips to Montreal, seems more likely than an inter-racial courtship and wedding at Rome, New York.

Canadian census records show that George and Caroline's first two children, Mary (b.1855) and Margaret (b.1856), were born in the United States. They were almost certainly born at Ogdensburg as advertisements for George's barber shop appear in Ogdensburg's *St. Lawrence Republican* newspaper as late as February and March 1858.

*Shaving and Hair-Dressing – George Gilbert's Shaving and Hair-Dressing Saloon, in the basement of Royal Vilas' building, Ford Street, Ogdensburg, New York. A variety of the best newspapers are always on his table.*<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> *An Introductory History of African Americans in Rome, New York*, compiled by Jessie Thorpe for the Afro-American Heritage Association (1994).

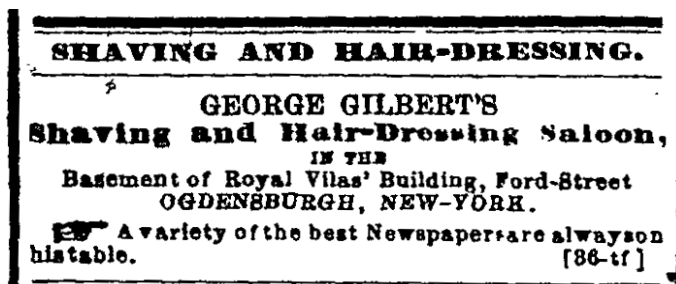
<sup>37</sup> 1880 U.S. Census living in the household of Mulatto Richard Wells at Lombard, Du Page County, Illinois. Margaret died at Lombard, Illinois.

<sup>38</sup> 1871 and 1881.

<sup>39</sup> If so, she had a brother, Joseph, born at the same place in 1839.

<sup>40</sup> In about 1890, Caroline Laurie-Gilbert's daughter, Wilhelmina (1868-1934), married widower Francois Aubut (1841-1916) who had been born at Riviere-Ouelle, directly across the river from Les Éboulements. It might be surmised that, after she was widowed in 1874, Caroline returned to her home town, that Wilhelmina went with her, and eventually married at either Les Éboulements or nearby Riviere-Ouelle.

<sup>41</sup> *St. Lawrence Republican*, February 23, March 9, 16, 23 & 30.



Later that year, 1858, George Gilbert and family left Ogdensburg and the United States, crossing into Canada. On December 7, 1858 the Gilberts first son, George Henry, was born at Smiths Falls<sup>42</sup>, and by the end of the year they were living at Perth.

The reasons for their decision to leave the United States are unknown, but were likely connected to uncertainties created by the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, the 'Dred Scott' ruling of the United States Supreme Court in 1857, and deteriorating prospects for the African American barbering trade.

The Fugitive Slave Act required that all escaped slaves, re-captured anywhere in the United States, were to be returned to their masters, and that free state officials and citizens were obliged by law to cooperate in their return. As a result, from 1850, even free states like New York were overrun by 'slave catchers'; men who were not very particular about whether those they 'captured' were runaway slaves or free-born Blacks. The 'Dred Scot' ruling determined that "a negro, whose ancestors were imported into [the U.S.], and sold as slaves", whether enslaved or free, was not an American citizen and had no standing in federal court. Thus, deprived of citizenship and protection of the law, from 1857 even free Blacks were at ever greater risk of being kidnapped and hauled into servitude south of the Mason-Dixon line.

The history of Black barbering in the United States also offers clues to why George Gilbert, as well as Edward H. Brown and John S. Jackson, made their way to Perth.

In pre-revolutionary America, White labor was scarce and expensive, so slave holders turned to their slaves for a shave and a trim. After the revolution, the premium Americans placed on personal independence grew and service work came to be regarded as beneath Whites while, at the same time, challenges to the morality of slavery led to widespread emancipation in the Northern states and some manumission in the South. The result was thousands of former slaves, many with experience as valets, manservants or barbers, entering a labor market with few opportunities beyond manual labor or household service. Barbering offered one of very few opportunities for self employment and independent prosperity.

During the early 19th century, Black-owned barbershops served a mostly prominent and wealthy White clientele; the customers best able to pay for their services. In catering to Whites, however, Black barbers became dependent on this clientele, as it forced them to deny service to their own race because Whites, in both the north and south, objected to receiving a shave or haircut employing the same instruments used on Blacks.

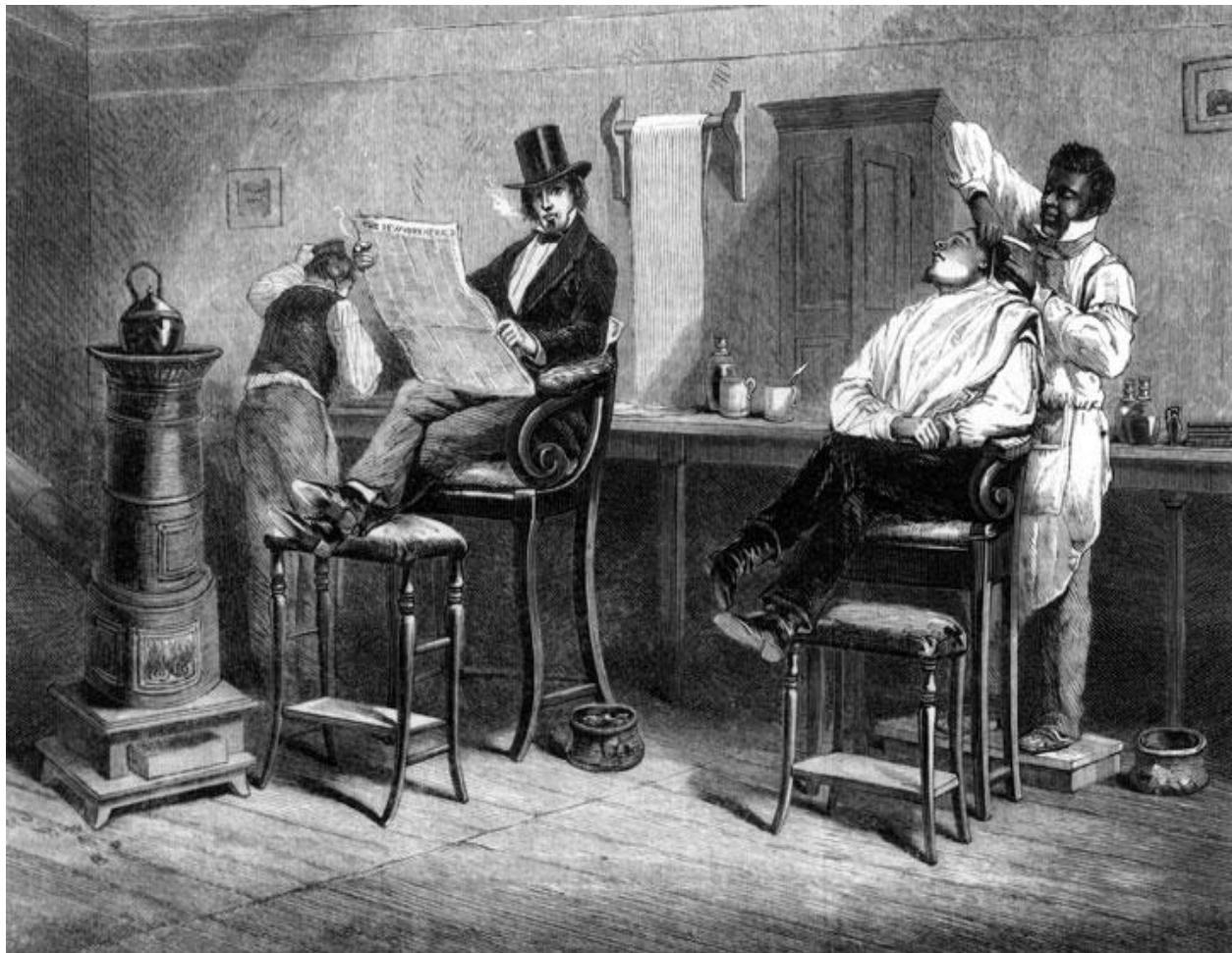
White men's comfort with their Black barbers began to erode in the 1830s, however, when the evangelical religious revival, and the associated growth of the temperance movement, damned the ribald whiskey lubricated good cheer of the traditional barber shop (the sort of shop Edward H. Brown recreated at the Victoria Saloon at Perth in the 1850s). At about the same time

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<sup>42</sup> DOB/POB according to his marriage certificate.

a series of public health crises prompted doctors and health advocates to advise that men should shave themselves. As important, the growing prosperity of Black barbers bred resentment and was seen as threatening the social order. Nineteenth century intellectuals were also increasingly subscribing to pseudo-scientific theories on race, positing that Whites and Black were the result of separate acts of divine creation and should be segregated.

Between the turn of the century and 1850, American upper-class males abandoned Black-owned barbershops. At the same time, new immigrant barbers, primarily Germans who saw no social status issues associated with their trade, were arriving in increasing numbers. Fashion also changed, and men eschewed the clean-shaven chin of their fathers to grow beards. While Whites had represented only 20% of Philadelphia's barbers in 1850, by 1860 they represented nearly 50%. A handful of elite Black barbers continued to prosper, but by the time Edward H. Brown and George Gilbert opened shops at Perth in the 1850s, the days when Blacks dominated the American trade were coming to an end.<sup>43</sup>



*African American Barber Shop c1855*

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<sup>43</sup> This short history of Black barbering is drawn from *Cutting Along the Color Line*, by Quincy T. Mills (2016), ISBN 978-0812-2237-98 and *The Racially Fraught History of the American Beard*, by Sean Trainor, *Atlantic Magazine*, January 20, 2014.

For George Gilbert, emigration probably offered opportunities no longer available in the United States. Apart from seeking better prospects in the barbering trade, and placing themselves and their children beyond the reach of slave catchers, the Gilberts may also have hoped that their inter-racial, inter-faith, union might be burdened with less historic, cultural and social baggage than it was even in a free state like New York. Whatever their specific reasons, in 1858, George Gilbert and family arrived at Perth, Lanark County, Canada West.

George Gilbert opened a barber shop, and Caroline Gilbert established a sewing room, in the lower level of the O'Brien building at 55 Gore Street East. Their business premises were accessed from street level by exterior steps and a verandah over the Little Tay River.<sup>44</sup> That location is little changed today; except the rooms and verandah are now occupied by a restaurant. The Gilbert family also seem to have lived in the same building.<sup>45</sup>



*O'Brien Block c2015. In 1860 the Gilbert Barber Shop and sewing rooms were off the lower verandah.*

In February 1866, the *Perth Courier* published “a graphic history of our good town” composed by an unnamed “poetical friend”. The poem is 50 verses long, fills 2 ½ full broad-sheet columns, and seems to name just about everyone of significance living at Perth that year; yet, even in such a crowded field, George Gilbert rated four full lines.

*G. Gilbert has a barber's shop  
Where he will reap the bristly crop;  
He does his business up complete,  
And, tho' he shaves, is not a cheat.*<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> *Merchants, Professionals and Tradespeople of Perth*, by Gus Quattrocchi (1998).

<sup>45</sup> In the 1861 census an O'Brien family is living at the same location.

<sup>46</sup> *Perth Courier*, February 16, 1866, Stanza-9.

Later that year Gilbert is mentioned in a *Courier* account of a local cricket match, the competing sides for which had been selected according to their facial hair.

*... last Saturday afternoon a match was played between 11 of the members who boasted hirsute appendages, and 11 who were what people often expressively term "bare faced", or as it was expressed by the cricketers themselves, between 11 'Beards' and 11 'No Beards' ... The 'Beards' were decidedly below par, and some of the more sanguine 'No Beards' ventured to predict that Mr. Gilbert, our excellent barber, would be extensively patronized before many hours, by those unfortunate 'Beards' that were ... so completely 'lathered' that they would immediately get 'shaved'.<sup>47</sup>*

Over the 42 years of Perth's existence before Edward H. Brown arrived in 1853, the trimming of locks and shaving of chins was essentially an at-home affair. The soldier-settlers were long accustomed to providing haircuts and shaves to each other while serving in the army and, for the rest, wives and friends probably furnished the service. Although operational for only a short time, the first commercial barber shop seems to have been that of Louis Beal<sup>48</sup>, established in early 1837.

*Louis Beal, Barber, Hairdresser and Perfumer – Who has recently come to reside in this town to practice the above line of business, has opened his shop immediately opposite the St. George's Hotel [corner of Drummond and Harvey Streets], and hopes by strictest attention to business, to merit that public patronage which has heretofore been so liberally extended toward him and which he flatters himself, from his extensive knowledge in the above line, he deserves. To the inhabitation of Perth and vicinity he returns his sincere thanks for the kindness they have already shown him. NB Clothes cleaned and razors set in the best style – Perth, February 15, 1837.<sup>49</sup>*

Louis Beal's presence at Perth appears to have been a brief one and, as the *Courier* cricket article and poem suggest, during most of his first decade at Perth, Gilbert was the town's only barber. When he first arrived, Gilbert was briefly in competition with 'E. H. Brown's Variety Store' (cum barber shop), but for the next seven years he had the tonsorial field to himself until, in July 1868, another barber arrived.

*New Barber Shop In Perth – The subscriber will open today (Friday) in Holliday's Building, nearly opposite the Market, a new Barber Shop, where he will be prepared to execute all manner of shaving, Haircutting, Shampooing and all other branches of barbering, at all times. Work done every day of the week, Sundays excepted. – E. Love.<sup>50</sup>*

Gilbert immediately responded with some advertising of his own, subtly reminding his customers of his long-standing service to the community, thanking them for their support, and reducing his prices to compete with Edwin Love.

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<sup>47</sup> *Perth Courier*, July 6, 1866.

<sup>48</sup> Beal's race is unknown.

<sup>49</sup> *Bathurst Courier & Ottawa General Advertiser*, March 23, 1838.

<sup>50</sup> *Perth Courier*, July 10, 1868.

*The undersigned begs most respectfully to return his sincere thanks for the liberal patronage bestowed upon him during the past 10 years, and would now inform the public that he is still ready to perform, in the most attentive and best manner, all work that he may be favored with in his line. He has reduced the price of haircutting, to the uniform rate of Ten Cents. Particular attention given to cutting ladies and children's hair, and other branches of his business – G. Gilbert.*<sup>51</sup>

The competing Gilbert and Love barbershop advertisements ran weekly in the *Perth Courier* for the next five months, from July through November 1868. George Gilbert's customers seem to have remained loyal, however. At the end of 1868 or early in 1869, Love moved his business to the Village of Lanark, leaving Gilbert, once again, in sole possession of the barbering business at Perth.

As Perth's barbers engaged in their polite advertising duel that summer, George Gilbert found himself drawn into a more physical contest. Reported by the *Courier* among the "Quarter Sessions & County Court" news, the fracas seems to have been a rather minor affair, but the outcome probably tells us something about Perth's regard for Gilbert.

*Henry Philip, Appellant, and George Gilbert, Respondent – Gilbert had gone to the hall occupied by the Sons of Temperance to take away some articles of furniture claimed as his own, and in doing so took two chairs which Philip (who had charge of the furniture for the Sons) claimed as their property, and interposed to prevent their removal. In the scuffle, Philip fell, and his boot touched Gilbert's hand. For this touch, he was tried and convicted before Alex Fraser, J.P., for Assault and Battery – from this conviction he appealed. The jury, however, seemed to think an assault had been committed, and returned a verdict sustaining the conviction.*<sup>52</sup>

As is apparent from the tone of this report, the *Courier* editor<sup>53</sup> disagreed with the initial judgement of Magistrate Alexander Fraser and, subsequently, with that of the County Court jury. This difference of opinion, however, probably had little to do with the merits of the case, and much to do with politics. The 'Reform' *Courier* was consistently at odds with arch 'Tory' Alexander Fraser<sup>54</sup>, and took every opportunity to find fault with him. Even though Henry Philip (1829-1892) was an apparently respectable Scots-born resident of the town for six years, a cabinet maker with his own shop, and a married man with a family, Magistrate Fraser believed Philip to be the offender and, on appeal, an all white jury of his peers agreed.

George Gilbert, and his wife Caroline, were also frequently judged, if less onerously, in other circumstances. When the 1871

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<sup>51</sup> *Perth Courier*, July 24, 1868.

<sup>52</sup> *Perth Courier*, September 18, 1868.

<sup>53</sup> In 1868 George Lockhart Walker (1838-1875) was owner-editor of the *Perth Courier*.

<sup>54</sup> Even in 19<sup>th</sup> century Upper Canadian terms, Fraser was notable for his extreme conservative, monarchist, far-right politics and personal views, but he adhered to an equally strong sense of justice that condemned any hint of racial prejudice. As a young junior officer with the New Brunswick Fencible Regiment in 1814 Fraser has been at the forefront of demanding commutation of a death sentence levied on a Black soldier, Private Pedro Santero, who had accidentally killed a fellow soldier in a brawl prompted by racist bullying. When the commutation effort failed and Santero was hung, Fraser joined fellow Subalterns in tearing down the gallows and throwing it in the Saint John River. – See *Forgotten Hero – Alexander Fraser*, by Ron W. Shaw & M. E. Irene Spence (2012).

... prizes were awarded at the show of the South Riding of the Lanark Agricultural Society, held in the Drill Hall Shed, on Thursday and Friday, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> October [the winners included] Gentlemen's Class - Plain Hand-sewing and Needle-work: Best Gent's Cotton Shirt: 1<sup>st</sup>, George Gilbert ...<sup>55</sup>

George Gilbert, it seems, was as handy with a needle and thread as he was with barber shears. Seamstress Caroline Gilbert also exhibited handiwork at the 1871 fair.

Some very fine specimens of needle-work were shown by Mrs. Geo. Gilbert, consisting of children's clothes, gent's linen and cotton shirts, and other things of similar nature. This display could hardly be excelled even in a city exhibition.<sup>56</sup>

**HOT & COLD BATHS.**  
 The subscriber would respectfully announce to the public that he has fitted up his establishment with  
**HOT & COLD BATHS,**  
 furnished with all the requisite conveniences and appliances. Open at all reasonable hours.  
 Remember the place—O'Brien's Buildings.  
**GEORGE GILBERT, Barber.**  
 Perth, 6th July, 1871. 141F

At the 1872 show, first prize for "Ladies Work – embroidery on muslin" went to Caroline Gilbert with an additional mention that, "Mrs. Gilbert exhibited some excellent specimens of babies' clothing, beautifully worked and flowered with silk thread".<sup>57</sup>

George Gilbert was an entrepreneur with an eye for new opportunities. In the summer of 1871 he expanded his services, advertising in the *Perth Courier*,

*Hot & Cold Baths – The subscriber would respectfully announce to the public that he has fitted up his established with Hot & Cold Baths. Furnished with all the requisite conveniences and appliances. Open at all reasonable hours. Remember the place, O'Brien's Buildings – George Gilbert, Barber.*<sup>58</sup>

The following spring, although his wife's seamstress business remained in the O'Brien building, Gilbert moved his barber shop and bath house.

*Removal Of Barber Shop – The undersigned begs to inform the public that he has removed his Barber Shop to the building directly opposite his old stand, where he will be in readiness to attend to the wants of the public in his line - George Gilbert.*<sup>59</sup>

**REMOVAL OF BARBER SHOP.**—The undersigned begs to inform the public that he has removed his Barber Shop to the building directly opposite his old stand, where he will be in readiness to attend to the wants of the public in his line. **GEORGE GILBERT.** Perth, 20th April, 1872. 31-c

<sup>55</sup> *Perth Courier*, October 13, 1871.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *Perth Courier*, October 11 & 18, 1872.

<sup>58</sup> Advertisement appeared in the *Courier* from July 1<sup>st</sup> through September 1<sup>st</sup> 1871.

<sup>59</sup> Advertisement appeared in the *Courier* April 26<sup>th</sup> and May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1872.

The new location was in a small single-storey annex attached to the south end of the then Graham Block, on the west side of Gore Street, between Herriott Street and the Little Tay River (44-48 Gore Street East).<sup>60</sup> Shortly after completing the move, Gilbert once again added to the range of services offered by his shop.

*Clothes Cleaning – The subscriber wishes to inform the public of Perth and vicinity that, in connection with his Barbering Business, he is prepared to renovate and clean Gentlemen’s Clothing of all kinds. – Clothes cleaned as good as new – Geo. Gilbert<sup>61</sup>.*



**The Graham Block c1901. George Gilbert's Barber Shop was located in the small, single-storey, annex attached to the south (left) end of the building. The Graham building was subsequently replaced by the present building at 44-48 Gore Street East.**

As the barber shop, bath house and clothes cleaning business expanded, so did the Gilbert family. Mary and Margaret, born at Ogdensburg, New York, in 1855 and 1857, were joined by George Jr. (b.1858), Frederick (b.1863), Caroline (b.1867), Wilhelmina (b.1868) and Lelina (b.1871), all born at Perth<sup>62</sup>. In the 1871 census, George Sr. and all of the children are enumerated as 'African', while Caroline Gilbert is recorded as 'French'. George Sr. was literate, Caroline could read but could not write, George Jr. and Frederick were attending school, Mary and Margaret were no longer attending school, and the other children were too young for school.

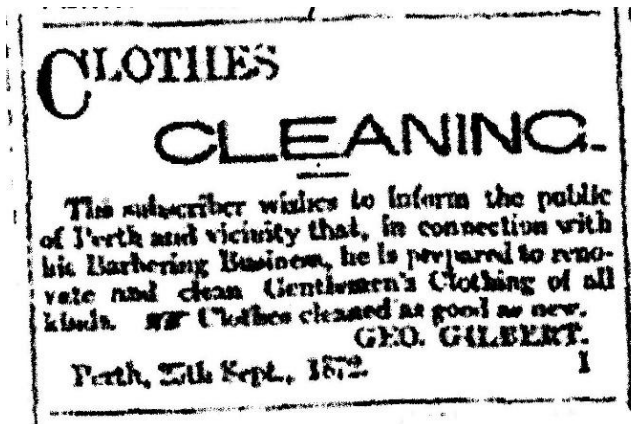
In September of 1874 George Gilbert sold his barbering business, to John S. Jackson, and, three months later, on Sunday, December 13, 1874, at the age of only 39 years, he died at Perth, leaving a widow and a family of seven children aged three to 19.

<sup>60</sup> *Merchants, Professionals and Tradespeople of Perth (Pg-60)*, by Gus Quattrocchi (1998), Quattrocchi states that in 1911 the Graham Block was purchased by T.A. Code and replaced with the three-storey building, 44-48 Gore Street East, now occupied by the Royal Bank of Canada.

<sup>61</sup> *Perth Courier*, September 27, 1872.

<sup>62</sup> According to his marriage certificate, George Jr. was actually born at Smiths Falls, December 7, 1858.

Gilbert may have fallen seriously ill in 1874 and been unable to carry on his business; but the dates of the sale and his death may also be coincidental. He might have decided to move to another town, or even return to the United States, but died suddenly and unexpectedly. Whatever reason prompted the sale, Gilbert's son, George Henry, did not take over the Perth shop. George Jr. had, presumably, been apprenticing under his father, because within a few years he opened his own barber shop at Carleton Place, but in September 1874 he was just approaching his sixteenth birthday and must have been considered too young and inexperienced to take on the family business.



George Gilbert was buried in Elmwood Cemetery, Section-C. When Elmwood opened in 1872 a large part of the north end of Section-C was set-aside for 'pauper' graves, but that Gilbert was interred in one of those seems doubtful. Cemetery records of the day did not always record the names of those buried as paupers, at County government expense, but George Gilbert's name was entered in the cemetery register.<sup>63</sup> Also, while the Gilbert family was a large one and no doubt not wealthy, it was a two-

income family and probably capable of meeting the funeral expense of their late husband and father. If his grave, probably located in the south end of Section-C, was ever marked by a stone, however, it has long since disappeared.

The Gilbert family remained in Perth for another two or three years; perhaps to allow George Gilbert Jr. to complete his barbering apprenticeship under the shop's new owner, John Jackson. Caroline Lawrie-Gilbert once again won first price for the "*Best embroidery on flannel*"<sup>64</sup> at the September 1875 South Lanark Agricultural Society Fair and continued to live and work as a seamstress at Perth until about 1877. She later moved to Ottawa where she was enumerated, in 1881, living with her daughters Caroline 16, Wilhelmina, 14, and Lelina, 11, and working as a seamstress. Her date and place of death have not been determined.

George and Caroline Gilbert were the parents of seven children.

Mary (b.1855) married a man named Vandusen in about 1871 in the United States. She and her daughter, Mable (b.1872) were living with her grandmother, Margaret Gilbert, at Rome in 1875 but, by the early 1880s, Mary was dead, and Mable was living in an orphanage at Utica.

George Henry (b.1858) opened a barber shop on Bridge Street in Carleton Place in about 1877. In 1880, he married Elizabeth Ann Hayden (1862-1946)<sup>65</sup>, of North Gower, and relocated to Almonte, where he worked as a barber and hairdresser for the remainder of his life. The 1881

<sup>63</sup> Although the specific grave site number was not recorded, George Gilbert's burial at Elmwood is noted in a book of memorial transcriptions and other material drawn from "*copies/photocopies of early cemetery records*" compiled 1988-1990 by Jean Hossie, Iva Headrick & Dorothy Frizell, and expanded 1990-1992 by Robert & Roberta Sargeant (Algonquin College Library, Perth)..

<sup>64</sup> *Perth Courier*, September 24, 1875.

<sup>65</sup> Daughter of Joseph R. Haydon & Eliza Jane Graham, Almonte, Ontario.

census records George as 'African' but 10 years later his 'racial origin' is listed as 'English'. With a Mulatto grandmother and father, and a White mother, he seems to have crossed the color line with the new century. He was the father of two sons and a daughter<sup>66</sup>.

George Henry died, aged 49 years, of diphtheria and meningitis, at Almonte in 1907.

Frederick (b.1863), moved to Ottawa and worked for a time as a messenger in the Canadian Senate but died of consumption, at age 25, at Montreal in 1889. He was unmarried.

Caroline (b.1867), died at Almonte in 1888, unmarried, aged 21 years, the victim of diphtheria.

Wilhemina (b.1868) moved to Ottawa with her mother Caroline, where they lived and owned a dressmaker (couturier) shop in the ByWard Market. Wilhelmina later moved to Quebec and married widower Francois Marcel Aubut (1841-1916) in about 1890. He had been born at Riviere-Ouelle, Kamouraska, Quebec and they lived at Grand-Mère (Shawinigan), Quebec, then Williamstown, Orange County, Vermont and finally at Berlin, New Hampshire where Wilhelmina died in 1938. Wilhelmina was the mother of two sons and a daughter and step-mother to a son and a daughter.

Daughters Margaret (b.1856) and Lelina (b.1871) moved to the Ottawa with their mother Caroline and sister Wilhelmina, but details of their lives are unknown.

### John S. Jackson & Eliza McKenny

Three months before George Gilbert died, the *Perth Courier* published the following announcement and advertisement.

*Tonsorial – Mr. John Jackson, of New York, has taken the barber shop lately occupied by Mr. George Gilbert, and will conduct the business in the best style from this date.*

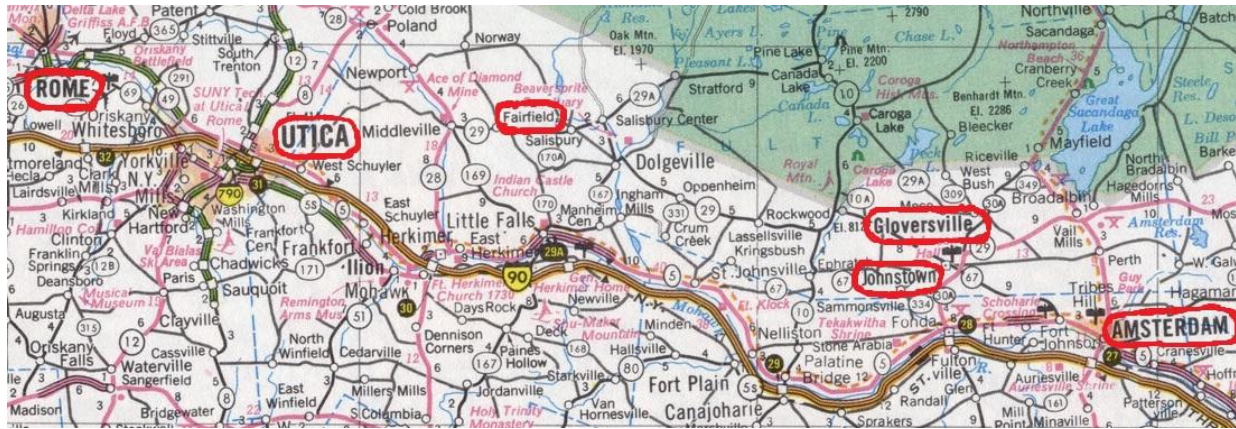
*New Barber-Shop In Perth – John S. Jackson (late of New York) begs to inform the public of Perth and vicinity that he has taken the shop lately occupied by Mr. George Gilbert, and having fitted the premises up to a first-class style, and put in the latest style of Parisian Chair, is prepared to do all sorts of Barbering, Hair-Dressing, and Shampooing in the Latest Style. Call and try him. Particular attention given to cutting hair for Children. Charges Moderate. – John S. Jackson, Perth.<sup>67</sup>*

**NEW BARBER-SHOP IN PERTH.** - JOHN S. JACKSON, (late of New York,) begs to inform the public of Perth and vicinity that he has taken the shop lately occupied by Mr. George Gilbert, and having fitted the premises up to a first-class style, and put in the latest style of Parisian Chair, is prepared to do all sorts of Barbering, Hair-Dressing, and Shampooing in the Latest Style. Call and try him. Particular attention given to Cutting Hair for Children. Charges Moderate. JOHN S. JACKSON. Perth, Sept. 7th, 1874. R/S

<sup>66</sup> Minnie (1881-1972), Harry Haydon (1884-1960) and George Lloyd (1894-1967).

<sup>67</sup> *Perth Courier*, September 11, 1874.

Perth's new barber, like George Gilbert before him, was a Black American. Born between 1848 and 1852<sup>68</sup>, at Johnstown, Fulton County, New York<sup>69</sup>, Jackson's birthplace was only about 30 miles (48 km) east of the Gilbert's hometown of Fairfield, Herkimer County. Although there is no proof of such, that there could have been some family or other connection between Jackson and Gilbert does not seem beyond the realm of possibility.



**Locations & communities of the Gilbert and Jackson stories are situated along about 80 miles (130 Km) of the Erie Canal.**

The Jackson family were most likely descendants of slaves originally attached to the estate of Sir William Johnson (c1715-1774). The town of Johnstown was the creation of Sir William, the man who served as British Superintendent of Indian Affairs among the Mohawk Nation of the Iroquois Confederacy, ensuring their support against the French during the Seven Years' War (1754-1763)<sup>70</sup>. Johnson was also one of the largest land owners in British North America, having accumulated an estate of 170,000 acres in the Mohawk Valley<sup>71</sup>. In 1747 Johnson brought his first 19 slaves to the estate, and ultimately became the largest slave holder in the Colony of New York. By the 1770s he owned about 70 men, women and children, a number comparable to plantation owners in the south, and some of his more prosperous Irish and Scots tenants also owned slaves as well.

In 1762, Johnson founded Johnstown on his grant and built Johnson Hall where he lived, as a feudal landlord, until his death. The mistress of Johnson Hall was Molly Brant (c1736-1796), Johnson's consort, mother to nine of his children<sup>72</sup>, and elder sister of Mohawk war chief Joseph Brant (1743-1807).

<sup>68</sup> The 1881 & 1891 census indicate a DOB of 1848. The 1901 census records birth year as 1850 but notes that Jackson did not know his month and day of birth. The 1911 census records his birth date as June 1850, but no exact date. His obituary, *Perth Courier*, April 9, 1926, gives his POB as Johnstown, New York, and indicates his DOB as 1850. His Elmwood Cemetery tombstone indicates a DOB of 1852.

<sup>69</sup> However, no John S. Jackson appears in the Federal or State census records for Johnstown, New York. Possibly due to an error on the part of enumerators, Perth's barber was most likely the John H. Jackson born c1849 to Black laborer Thomas Jackson (b.1820) and his wife Margaret (b.1821).

<sup>70</sup> Known in the U.S. as the French & Indian Wars.

<sup>71</sup> The working portion of the estate amounted to about 700 acres surrounding Johnson Hall at what is now Johnstown, New York.

<sup>72</sup> Johnson never married but had multiple mistresses, White and Native American. He fathered dozens of children, and perhaps as many as 100.

The Johnson family supported the Loyalist cause during the American Revolution and then fled to Canada. Many of their slaves went with them. Molly Brant, taking along four of her personal slaves<sup>73</sup>, settled at Kingston, Ontario. Her brother, Joseph, led his Mohawk band to the Six Nations reserve near Brantford, Ontario. John Norton (c1760-c1830), Molly and Joseph's nephew (by adoption into the tribe<sup>74</sup>), served the British cause during the War of 1812.

Some the Johnson slaves, however, were left behind, becoming, with the confiscation of the Johnson estate, the property of others until the State of New York incrementally abolished slavery between 1799 and 1827. Following abolition most former slaves left the Mohawk valley but a few remained and became part of a small settlement in the Johnstown area.

Around 1870 John S. Jackson married Eliza McKenny. Eliza was a Black woman, born September 18, 1850<sup>75</sup> at Gloversville, a community located four miles north of Johnstown. In all likelihood, she and her family were glovemakers.

Gloversville, also lying within the former estate of Sir William Johnson, was originally known as Kingsboro but when re-named in 1853 was dubbed Gloversville for its primary industry, glove-making. Located in proximity to large hemlock forests to supply bark for tanning, Gloversville became a center of leather production from the earliest years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Beginning as a cottage industry, where men dressed the leather and women cut and sewed the gloves, in 1821 the village produced 4,000 pair. With the invention of the cutting die in 1834 and the sewing machine in 1853, glove-making grew to industrial scale. Home workers sewed the gloves from leather that had been tanned and cut in factories. The community was especially well known for its deerskin gloves and by mid-century large tanneries and glove shops employed nearly 80% of the residents of Gloversville and environs. By the 1890s 90% of all gloves sold in the United States were made at Gloversville.

*Hunters in South and Central America, in Africa and India; in Europe, and in Australia, and also both east and west in our own land, supply the skins, while the fishermen of Labrador and Newfoundland send oils to dress them. The lady's dainty foot is clad in leather of our tanning, while her hands are protected by our kids. Yes, and at the same time the miner wields his pick, and the lumberman his ax, in mittens from Gloversville.*<sup>76</sup>

John S. Jackson arrived in Canada within a year or two of his marriage, landing at "Brockville in charge of a number of racehorses".<sup>77</sup> Jackson's birthplace of Johnstown is only 30 miles (48 kilometers) west of Saratoga Springs, New York, a site of standardbred racing from 1847 and home of Saratoga Racetrack founded in 1863. One might speculate that Jackson had been working as a groom or jockey at one of the area horse farms<sup>78</sup>.

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<sup>73</sup> Abraham Johnson and sisters Jenny/Jane and Juba Fonda.

<sup>74</sup> John Norton's father was born into the Cherokee Nation in Tennessee, but raised in England and his mother was Scottish.

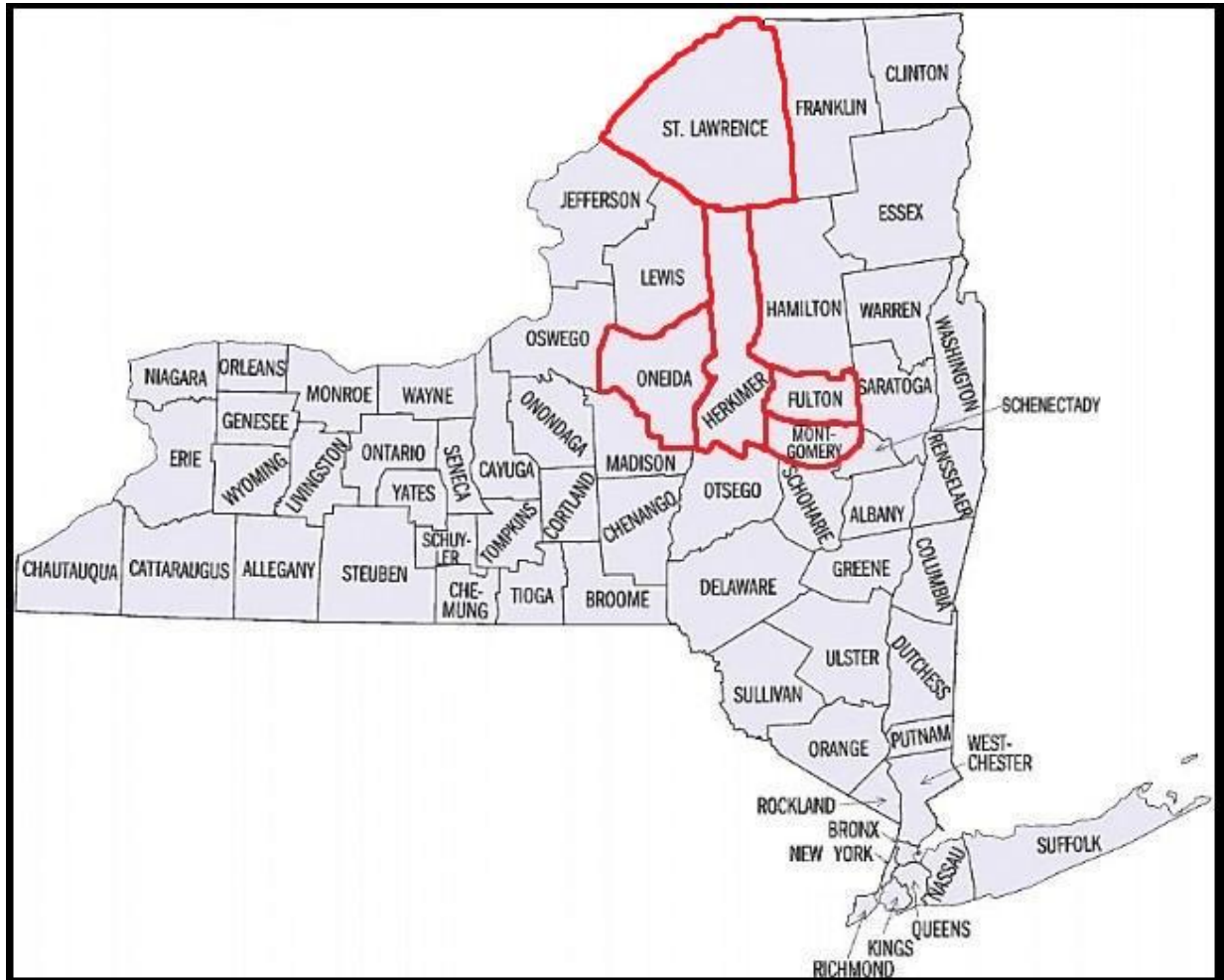
<sup>75</sup> Canada census 1911.

<sup>76</sup> *History of Kingsboro and Gloversville*, by Rev. Isaac O. Rankin (1892).

<sup>77</sup> *Perth Courier*, April 9, 1926.

<sup>78</sup> Canadian horse racing's Queen's Plate was established in 1860 in hope that its large purse and royal prestige would encourage breeders from the U.S. and Britain to bring quality breeding stock to Canada. Although entirely speculative, it is possible that Jackson was delivering horses to the farm of Eliza Maria Harvey-Jones located on the eastern outskirts of Brockville. Best known for her pioneering leadership in the breeding of dairy cattle, Eliza was also a highly regarded breeder of race and carriage horses which she sold across Canada and the U.S. While Eliza Jones ran the family farm, her husband, Architect Chilion Jones (1838-1912) and

Whatever his earlier connection with horses, in the early 1870s Jackson opened a barber shop at Merrickville, Grenville County, Ontario, and then “at the age of around 25 he came to Perth”.<sup>79</sup> Whether Eliza Jackson accompanied her husband when he delivered the horses or joined him later at Merrickville is unknown.<sup>80</sup>



**John Jackson and his wife Eliza McKenny were born in Fulton County, and Eliza would later die in neighboring Montgomery County. George Gilbert was born in Herkimer County, his mother was born in Montgomery County, and the Gilbert family later lived in Oneida County, before George moved to Ogdensburg in St. Lawrence County.**

At Perth, Jackson operated the former Gilbert barbershop attached to the Graham block (now 44-48 Gore Street East) until about 1877 when widow Caroline Gilbert closed her sewing rooms and moved to Ottawa. Jackson then transferred his business back across the street and re-occupied the original Gilbert shop in the O’Brien block (now 45-53 Gore Street East).

his partner Thomas Fuller (b.1823) designed the parliament buildings in Ottawa and built St. James Anglican Church and Nevis Cottage at Perth.

<sup>79</sup> *Perth Courier*, April 9, 1926.

<sup>80</sup> The 1901 Canadian census records the year of arrival for both John and Eliza Jackson as 1876, but that date might apply to only Eliza as John is otherwise documented in Canada several years before that date.

In 1880 he moved his shop again to a stand adjoining the Ferrier Harness Shop (now 42 Gore Street East) *“where he also conducted a tobacco business, advertised ... by the image of an Indian holding in his right hand a number of cigars”*.<sup>81</sup> In about 1889 he moved again to a stand in the Hotel Cecil<sup>82</sup> on Cockburn Island (64-72 block, Gore Street East).

During his first year or two at Perth, Jackson, like Gilbert, was the only barber in town, but he soon had competition. In September 1876, barber James Perrault opened for business.

*A new Barber Shop has opened last week, so we can now boast of two of these establishments ....*<sup>83</sup>



Then in November of the same year Edwin Love, who had failed to supplant George Gilbert in 1868, returned to Perth, establishing a stand in the Hick's Hotel.<sup>84</sup> In 1881 James Shaver set up shop at 52 Foster Street and in the same year Mrs. Thomas Wilson, was offering *“milliner & hair work”*<sup>85</sup> at an unknown location. In 1894 Marcus Lapointe opened a shop in the Allan House Hotel at 64 Gore Street East, and in 1900 Frank Cline began barbering at 40 Gore Street East. Over the course of John Jackson's barbering career at Perth, however, all but one of these competing shops proved short-lived. Only Edwin Love, succeeded by Ambrose Love, were consistently in business into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. When Edwin Love died in 1914 the *Perth Courier*, conflating John Jackson and George Gilbert, noted that as a barber Love's,

*... only opposition in that line for years was the late George Gilbert [ & John Jackson], a colored man, once one of the best-known men in town.*<sup>86</sup>

Although Eliza McKenny-Jackson was probably a skilled glove maker, there is no surviving documentary evidence that she worked outside the Jackson home. There is also no evidence that the Jacksons had any children.

As in the case of his barber-predecessor, John Jackson was a popular and active participant in local society. *“As a musician ... he played a prominent part in his earlier days and was the leader of an orchestra as a violinist and was an expert guitarist”*.<sup>87</sup> Composition of the Jackson orchestra was fluid but in March 1877, when his *“string band”* played at a *“Penny Reading”*<sup>88</sup> sponsored by the *Sons of Temperance* in Lanark, it consisted of *“John Jackson,*

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<sup>81</sup> *Perth Courier*, April 9, 1926.

<sup>82</sup> Formerly the Allan House Hotel.

<sup>83</sup> *Perth Courier*, October 13, 1876.

<sup>84</sup> Edwin Love (1838-1914) was born at Dickerson's Landing near Cornwall and served in the Union Cavalry during the U.S. Civil War before coming to Perth..

<sup>85</sup> *Perth Directory 1880-1881*.

<sup>86</sup> *Perth Courier*, April 10, 1914.

<sup>87</sup> *Perth Courier*, April 9, 1926.

<sup>88</sup> A popular form of entertainment in the 19<sup>th</sup> century consisting of readings, recitations, music and song to which an admission of one penny was charged.

*James McFarlane, J. D. Maxwell, and Miss Maggie Bowes, the latter playing the concertina*".<sup>89</sup> He was also "a cornet player in the local band"<sup>90</sup> (the Perth Citizens Band of today).

In addition, Jackson was an admired sportsman. As a member of the Perth Cricket Club<sup>91</sup>, between about 1875 and 1885, he was often selected to play with the local eleven against clubs from Almonte, Arnprior, Lanark, Smiths Fall and, on occasion, Kingston. In 1883, when the club played an intramural match between its married and unmarried members, the *Perth Courier* reported that,

*Where the play of nearly all was good, it may yet be not considered invidious to mention particularly Messrs. Sherrat and Jackson who contributed very largely to the success of their side [Married]. The bowling of Mr. Sherrat proved very destructive .... While Mr. Jackson drove the 'leather' into all parts of the field in his endeavours to secure runs for his side.*<sup>92</sup>

The *Almonte Gazette* also acknowledged Jackson's cricket prowess; "In his day, he had no equal in these parts as a wicket keeper. He learned the game in his hometown of Johnstown, New York".<sup>93</sup> In the mid-1850s cricket had become all the rage across the eastern United States and clubs were organized at Johnstown and Gloversville, with nearby Amsterdam, a town of less than 3,000 people, boasting five clubs on its own.

John and Eliza Jackson became naturalized British Subjects in 1877 and John performed his civic duty serving on a Grand Jury in June of 1888. He and Eliza were members of the Methodist church.

By the mid-1880s John Jackson was styling his business the 'C.P.R. Shaving Parlor and Tobacco Store'. He had not moved to the railway station but had perhaps chosen the name because his shop at 42 Gore Street East was a near neighbor to the CPR ticket and telegraph office at 56 Gore Street East. For the 1885 Christmas season he advertised,

*XMAS at the C.P.R. Shaving Parlor and Tobacco Store. We have just received for the holidays a choice lot of goods in our line, which we will dispose of at very low prices. The stock embraces: Meerschaum and briar pipes, cigar holders, tobacco pouches, cut and plug, cigars, numerous brands. In toilet articles: Razors, straps, soaps, mugs, hair oils, perfumes, brushes, &c. Hair cutting, shaving and shampooing done in our usual manner. Call and see us, J. S. Jackson, Dec 15th, 1885.*

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<sup>89</sup> *Perth Courier*, April 9, 1926.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> The Perth Cricket Club was organized in June 1866 (after the collapse of a prior club that had lasted only one or two seasons). About 50 members paid an annual membership fee of \$1.50. The original executive was: H.D. Shaw, President; J. S. Combs, Vice President; E. G. Malloch, Secretary-Treasurer. The club played locally every summer Tuesday and Saturday from 4:00 p.m. on ground rented for \$15 per year from Judge J. G. Malloch at the "head of Gore Street".

<sup>92</sup> *Perth Courier*, July 6, 1883.

<sup>93</sup> *Almonte Gazette* April 23, 1926.

On August 15, 1903, Eliza McKenny-Jackson, aged 52 years, died at Amsterdam, New York. Amsterdam is in Montgomery County, New York, a short distance southeast of their hometowns at Johnstown and Gloversville. Eliza was presumably visiting relatives at the time of her death. Despite being left a widower without family at Perth, John Jackson carried on with his business.

On the morning of November 22, 1920, Jackson faced disaster as smoke began pouring from the rear of the Hotel Cecil (64-72 Gore Street East)<sup>94</sup>, the building then housing his barber and tobacconist shop.

*The local firemen quickly responded to the fire alarms but some time elapsed before the exact whereabouts of the fire could be ascertained, and to do so it was found necessary to chop through the roof and outside walls in several places. Great volumes of smoke appeared from inside the building, and it was with the greatest difficulty the fire was fought by the firemen. Several streams of water were poured into the upper portions and nearly all of the firemen received a thorough soaking. A high wind considerably hampered them in their work. The two stores on the ground floor occupied by Mr. D. Glossop and Mr. John Jackson, as a boot and shoe business, and barber shop respectively, were flooded by the water pouring in from the rooms above. Willing hands removed the contents of the barber shop to safety. The boot and shoe stock of Mr. Glossop was badly damaged by water.*<sup>95</sup>

Then at least 70 years of age, Jackson, on his own, might have been unable to save his fixtures, equipment, supplies and tobacco stock, but the people of Perth did not hesitate to brave smoke and icy water on his behalf. With the essentials of his business rescued from destruction, just three weeks later the *Courier* was announcing Jackson's come-back.

*The premises in the Hotel Cecil block occupied as a barber shop by Mr. John S. Jackson, and damaged in the recent fire, are now being thoroughly renovated and when completed will be strictly up-to-the-minutes with a freshness which will be pleasing to John's many customers. The shop will be open for business in a few days.*<sup>96</sup>

In the same edition, however, the newspaper also published the following notice.

*Lost – A sum of money in Perth last Friday [December 3<sup>rd</sup>], the property of John S. Jackson, barber. Will finder please return to owner or leave at Courier Office.*<sup>97</sup>

**XMAS**

— AT THE —

**C. P. R. SHAVING PARLOR**

— AND —

**TOBACCO STORE.**

We have just received for the holidays a  
 choice lot of goods in our line, which we will  
 dispose of at very low prices. The stock  
 consists of:—

Meerschaum and briar pipes, cigar hold-  
 ers and cases, tobacco pouches, pipe  
 mounts, etc., tobacco, cut and  
 plug, cigars, numerous brands.

In toilet articles:

Razors, straps, soaps, soaps, hair oil,  
 perfumes, brushes, etc.,

Hair cutting, shaving, and  
 shampooing done in our usual  
 manner. Call and see us.

**J. S. JACKSON.**

Perth, B.C. 15th, 1920. 15c

<sup>94</sup> The former Allen House Hotel became the Hotel Cecil in 1911.

<sup>95</sup> *Perth Courier*, November 26, 1920.

<sup>96</sup> *Perth Courier*, December 10 1920.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

The Hotel Cecil was forced to close in 1922 when another fire destroyed its sheds and stables. John Jackson moved his barber shop to a stand in the former Spalding Distillery building at 106 Gore Street East. Then, in 1924, a small notice appeared in the *Perth Courier*;

*I am retiring from business through ill health and I offer my barber shop equipment for sale – John S. Jackson*<sup>98</sup>.

Suffering from chronic myocardia and arterial sclerosis<sup>99</sup>, Jackson's "health became so impaired he was compelled to give up his business and, on the advice of his close friends, he went to the House for the Aged"<sup>100</sup>.

The "House for the Aged" was the 'Lanark County House of Industry', sometimes called the 'House of Refuge', and more commonly known as the 'County Home' or the 'Poor House'. Until the House of Industry was established by the County government in 1903, the care of aged indigent citizens, without family or other private means of support, was provided for by having a Magistrate declare them vagrants and placing them in the only publicly financed shelter available, the County Jail. When two such 'inmates' died there in the 1880s the Carleton Place newspaper wrote,

*What better arguments do our County Councillors want to warrant them in proceeding with the House of Industry than deaths in such circumstances? Poverty, from whatever cause it comes, is not a crime. The only crime of these elderly citizens was their poverty ...*<sup>101</sup>

John Jackson's wife had died 20 years earlier, he had no children, and as a small-town barber had probably always lived hand to mouth. In the Dickensian workhouse tradition, residents of the House of Industry were theoretically expected to work for their support at jobs provided by the institution<sup>102</sup>, but many, like Jackson, were too old and too ill to do so and benefited from shelter and sustenance at County expense.

Less than two years later, on Good Friday, April 2, 1926, "*John S. Jackson, Perth's only colored resident, dropped dead at five o'clock ... and thus was taken one who had been a familiar figure in the town for over half a century.*"<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> *Perth Courier*, August 24, 1924.

<sup>99</sup> Death Certificate, Dr. W. G. Blair, April 2, 1926.

<sup>100</sup> *Perth Courier*, April 9, 1926. Today's 'Lanark Lodge'.

<sup>101</sup> That Lanark County should have a House of Industry was first proposed in 1887 but County Councillors were a parsimonious lot and the project moved forward very slowly. It was not until 1901 that a county-wide plebiscite supported the scheme with 3,030 voting in favor and 2,270 opposed (although the Town of Perth voted 232 in favor to only 21 opposed). Financed by a \$20,000 debenture, the facility opened in January 1903.

<sup>102</sup> The House of Industry, located in Bathurst Township on the western outskirts of Perth, had gardens and a small farm where residents produced much of their own food, as well as carpenter, shoe, tailor and paint shops where they might work.

<sup>103</sup> *Perth Courier*, April 9, 1926.



*Lanark County House of Industry, opening day, 1903*

The *Courier* marked the passing of the town's only Black citizen, and longest serving barber, with a half-column obituary; a considerable mark of respect and prominence when compared to the usual line or two given to the death of most residents.

*In the passing of Mr. Jackson, Perth has lost one of her outstanding characters whose place will be difficult to fill and he will be remembered by his friends as a man who always had a cheery disposition and an enthusiastic outlook in all matters concerning his welfare. There was nothing black about Mr. Jackson except his skin and otherwise he was white through and through.*

*A large number of citizens paid their last respects to the deceased by attending the funeral which was held on Saturday afternoon from Mr. Alex Blair's undertaking parlors to the United Church of Canada where a most solemn and impressive service was conducted by Rev. Arthur Wilkinson<sup>104</sup>. The singing of the three hymns during the service was led by a male quartet composed of Messrs. Ira Hammond [Public School Principal], Bert North, Robert Thornbury and George Thornbury. Miss McNeil presided at the organ.*

*Rev. Wilkinson delivered a most fitting funeral discourse and before concluding commended those present in showing their respect for one who was of another race and color, and doing for him what they would do for the first man of the town.*

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<sup>104</sup> Rev. Arthur Wilkinson was John Jackson's pastor at Ashbury Methodist Church, but in April 1926 conducted his funeral from St. Paul's United Church (formerly Knox Presbyterian) because, on January 10, 1925, branches of the Methodist, Baptist and Presbyterian Churches had amalgamated to create the United Church of Canada. The record of Jackson's funeral is actually in the archives of Knox Presbyterian Church.

*Mr. Wilkinson stated he had known the deceased very well, particularly since going to the Home where he had spent a good deal of time with the departed. In a marked sense the deceased had expressed his appreciation of the kindness shown him in the years behind him by certain Perth citizens whom he named and some of whom were in the present congregation. These citizens had made his last days as easy as possible and free from loneliness. Deceased had also referred to the fact that for many years he never had to worry about his Christmas dinner, which was provided to him most sumptuously and regularly. Again and again he expressed his appreciation of the many kindnesses extended to him, which made him realize he had not been forgotten in his last days.*<sup>105</sup>

Following the funeral service, the remains of John S. Jackson were conveyed to Elmwood Cemetery, Perth, by pallbearers Charles J. Foy (lawyer, Mayor 1905-1906 & 1909), W. S. Robertson (pharmacist and drug store owner), William B. Hart (bookseller and CPR agent)<sup>106</sup>, Frank L. Mitchell (high school headmaster), Robert E. Hicks (grocery store owner) and T. J. Devlin (merchant and one-time Deputy Mayor).

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, when a resident of the 'Poor House' died, the County was responsible for the cost of their funeral. For many that meant no cost at all. The body was *"tightly wrapped in the cotton sheet from his bed, then the sheet was tied tightly with bailing twine from head to toe using a 'timber-hitch' style of knot ... placed in a wagon ... and driven to Elmwood for immediate burial [in] the paupers' burial area"*.<sup>107</sup> For those with some amount of money remaining in their stipend account, the body might be taken to the Blair Funeral Parlor, placed in the proverbial 'pine box', conveyed to Elmwood and buried in one of the narrow graves set aside for paupers (now Section-C). A local clergyman would usually provide a grave-side prayer, but the grave went unmarked, and its occupant often unrecorded in the cemetery records.

In the 1920s, costs actually assessed to the County appear to have been minimal. Although the register book at Blair and Son Funeral Home (successor to the Alex Blair Funeral Parlor), show a good number of 'House of Industry' funerals, including that of John Jackson, their accompanying financial ledger shows no entries of costs or billing for any of them, including John Jackson's. While it is possible that Alex Blair was maintaining a separate financial ledger for indigent burials (now lost), it seems more likely that he was providing the service free of charge<sup>108</sup>.

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<sup>105</sup> *Perth Courier*, April 9, 1926.

<sup>106</sup> William Brown Hart (1859-1936), son and inheritor of Hart's Bookstore founder John Semple Hart (c1833-1917). At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Hart's Bookstore at Perth was *"the finest bookstore in the country outside Toronto and Montreal"*, according to the *Toronto Mail*.

<sup>107</sup> Elmwood Cemetery Chairman Eric Halpin, presentation to the Lanark County Council Community Service Committee, January 13, 2016.

<sup>108</sup> Alex Blair also did not charge for the cost of burying young children.

Nevertheless, 'Poor House' resident though he was, John Jackson's interment was clearly different. That the funeral was from the "*undertaking parlors*" suggests at least a short pre-service wake. At the time wakes were almost always held in the deceased's home, but on the rare occasion when that was not possible, the Blair facility did have a room, furnished in the style of a Victorian 'parlor', to accommodate a 'visitation'. That this was followed by a church service at St. Paul's United Church was equally unusual for indigent funerals and that the pall bearers for Jackson's final journey were some of Perth's leading citizens, more remarkable still.



Moreover, he was not buried in Elmwood's Section-C pauper's plot, but in gravesite G-77, perhaps purchased by himself in advance or by some benefactor. His final resting place was also marked with a small marble gravestone inscribed "*John S. Jackson, died April 2, 1926, aged 74 years*<sup>109</sup>, *At Rest*"<sup>110</sup>, an adornment most certainly not paid for by the County of Lanark. Who covered the cost of these funeral rites is unknown, but we can only assume the funeral was the last of the "*many kindnesses extended to him*" by his Perth friends.

John Jackson is actually memorialized twice in Elmwood Cemetery. Over the years, the exact location of the early set-aside for the paupers' graves was forgotten and plots in Section-C were mistakenly sold. As a result, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, cemetery workers digging new graves began unearthing disintegrating coffins and human remains. That led to discovery of the original 1872 cemetery design map showing nearly 200 very narrow gravesites reserved in that section, a plot that disappeared from later maps. Realizing that these were the House of Industry, and other, 'pauper graves', the cemetery board closed Section-C to future burials. They reassigned purchased plots to other locations in the cemetery, and undertook to identify Elmwood's paupers. Although the cemetery itself had no record of the names, drawing upon House of Industry records a list of more than 400 individuals was compiled and, in 2016, their names were etched on a memorial erected in Section-C.<sup>111</sup> Even though he was not buried in a Section-C pauper's plot, because John Jackson's name appeared in the House of Industry records, his name was included on the 'pauper grave' memorial.

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<sup>109</sup> John Jackson was more likely at least 76 years of age and may have been 78 years old when he died.

<sup>110</sup> In April 2016 Elmwood Cemetery Chairman Eric Halpin and the author located John Jackson's grave stone. It had fallen and broken, and was buried under about three inches of earth, but when recovered the inscription could still be clearly read. The author, with financial assistance from the Perth & District Historical Society, had the stone repaired and re-installed.

<sup>111</sup> The project to identify and memorialize the 'unknown paupers' was led by Elmwood Board of Trustees Chairman Eric Halpin, with the assistance of Cemetery Manager Wayne Harris. The memorial, a black granite two-sided headstone and bench, was donated by Costello & Company Monuments. Etching of the names was paid for by the County of Lanark.



*Paupers' Grave memorial, Elmwood Cemetery, Perth, Ontario*

## Nothing Black Except His Skin

As a study in early race relations at Perth, the discovered story of Black Sam, Edward H. Brown and the Gilbert and Jackson families is far too incomplete to serve as the basis for definitive conclusions. Superficially one may regard their experience as a mostly positive one. With the possible exception of Black Sam's arrest, mentions in the *Perth Courier* are either positive, or at least neutral, and, had those reports been untrue, Black Sam, E. H. Brown, the Gilberts and Jacksons would have been unlikely to remain at Perth throughout long periods of their adult lives. But to what extent did the *Perth Courier* accurately represent local public opinion and views on race in general? Does the use of language leave us any clues?

Over the 91 years between 1834 and 1925, when Black Sam, E. H. Brown, the Gilberts, and the Jacksons were living at Perth, the *Courier* referred to "Niggers" or a "Nigger" about 225 times, over about 4,500 editions. In those years, the *Courier* dedicated a large part of its available space to publishing fiction; serialized novels, short stories and poetry. The newspaper also reprinted a great deal of material 'clipped' from other journals, primarily American newspapers and feature services. With only a few exceptions, the appearance of the word "Nigger" in the *Courier* was within the externally sourced items.<sup>112</sup> Even though, at the time, the word was in common everyday usage as the denominator for Blacks, many of those examples were, and were intended to be, harshly derogatory, mocking, bigoted and racist.

Among those 225 instances, however, there were about a dozen locally rooted examples. Twice a town councillor is quoted using the expression "Nigger in the fence row"<sup>113</sup> and once, in an account of a hockey game between Perth and Smiths Falls, the same expression<sup>114</sup> appeared. The word also appeared twice, in mysteriously obscure usage, in two social news columns. An

<sup>112</sup> For example, the *Courier* published excerpts from Mark Twain's *Tom Sawyer* (1876) which uses the term "Nigger".

<sup>113</sup> *Perth Courier*, June 4, 1897.

<sup>114</sup> *Perth Courier*, January 20, 1922.

item from Elphin recounted that “Quite a number attended the party at McLaren’s Depot<sup>115</sup> last week ... every body was there and the nigger too”.<sup>116</sup> Another from Elm Grove noted that “A Mr. Lee and a home-made nigger, gave a concert in our school ...”.<sup>117</sup> A third item of social news described a bride dressed in “a tailored suit of Nigger Brown”<sup>118</sup> and a letter to the editor from a local soldier during WWI used the word in reference to a railway porter<sup>119</sup>. At a Masquerade Skating Carnival in Perth, two participants were described as costumed as “a Nigger”.<sup>120</sup> Another news item concerned an Ontario Department of Highways road improvement project between “Kingston and Nigger Hill”.<sup>121</sup>

In addition to the *Courier* news columns, however, between 1898 and 1925, the term appeared nearly 50 times in the advertisements of local merchants<sup>122</sup> who offered yard goods, underwear, men’s suits, coats and shoes in a color described as “Nigger Brown”.

The *Perth Courier* may have generally avoided use of the term in its own copy, but these examples do demonstrate that it was a common part of the local vernacular at the time; although not necessarily seen as the offensively racist term it is today.

Over the same 90 years the term “Darky” appeared in the *Courier* columns only 18 times, and always within the fiction columns or re-printed items from other journals. By comparison, the polite, socially acceptable term of the day, “Negro”, appeared in the pages of the *Perth Courier* more than 740 times, more than three times as often as “Nigger” and 40 times more often than “Darky”.

The terms “Nigger”, “Darky” or even “Negro” were never applied to Black Sam, Edward Brown, the Gilberts or the Jacksons. When the *Courier* made any reference to their race, and it did so only three times in 90 years, the term “Colored” was applied, an innocuous enough term at the time.

Statistics for the years when Black Sam, Edward Brown, George Gilbert and John Jackson lived at Perth, show that, through the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> and first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the racial composition of the Town of Perth was actually not greatly different than that of the country as a whole. There were simply very few Blacks living anywhere in Canada.<sup>123</sup> When about 0.4% of the Canadian population was classified as ‘African’, ‘Colored’ or ‘Mulatto’<sup>124</sup>, the

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<sup>115</sup> Snow Road, Palmerston Township, Frontenac County.

<sup>116</sup> *Perth Courier*, November 1, 1895. A possible reference to John Jackson’s string band?

<sup>117</sup> *Perth Courier*, October 23, 1896. The “home-made nigger”, was probably either a White entertainer in blackface, a puppet or a ventriloquist’s dummy.

<sup>118</sup> *Perth Courier*, November 26, 1920.

<sup>119</sup> *Perth Courier*, March 5, 1915.

<sup>120</sup> *Perth Courier*, February 15, 1901. Others at the same carnival were costumed as a “Negro”.

<sup>121</sup> *Perth Courier*, April 21, 1922.

<sup>122</sup> Shaw & McKerracher, J. T. Conway, H.M. Shaw, H.F. Armstrong, Mendels, J. Rubenstein, R.W. Croskey.

<sup>123</sup> From 1860 to 1925, as the population of Canada grew from 3.1 million to 9.3 million, the number of Blacks living in Canada fell from about 21,500 to 18,300 or 0.6% to 0.2% of total population. During the same period the population of the Town of Perth grew from 2,465 to 3,750. More than a century later, although a few representatives of several non-Caucasian races lived at Perth, the percentage of Blacks in the population remains about the same.

<sup>124</sup> Classifications applied at various times by the Canadian Census.

Black population of Perth was about 0.3%.<sup>125</sup> In real numbers, however, that statistic represents only a dozen individuals over a period of about 95 years; Black Sam and Brown, single men who lived at Perth in the 1830s-1850s, the Gilbert family of nine during the 1860s, the Jackson family of two from 1874 until 1903, and then widower John Jackson alone until his death in 1926.

Whatever their reasons, Black Sam, E. H. Brown and the Gilbert and Jackson families chose to live in what was truly 'small town Ontario'. During the period in question, the population of Perth and the contiguous Townships representing its primary economic base<sup>126</sup>, was very small. The population of the town itself remained static at about 2,500 people from 1860 through 1880 and then grew somewhat to 3,135 by 1890 and 3,750 by 1925. The surrounding rural population actually fell, from about 8,625 in 1860, to 7,300 in 1890 and then to 5,300 in 1925<sup>127</sup>. The combined population, therefore, dropped more than 18% from 11,125 in 1860 to 9,050 in 1925.

In such circumstances, where everyone pretty much knew everyone else, and a significant part of the population was related by either blood or marriage, the Gilberts and Jacksons were 'outsiders' even beyond race. Except for travelling minstrel shows visiting Perth periodically, up to the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Black Sam, Edward H. Brown, George Gilbert, John Jackson and their families would very likely have been the only Blacks many Perthites had ever seen, and even more likely the only Blacks they ever spoke with in their lives. In that Perth's first Blacks had the advantage of representing such a tiny racial minority, even within such a tiny population, they could not have represented much of a perceived 'threat' to anyone, no matter how racist a local might have been.

The question must be asked, however; were Black Sam, E. H. Brown, the Gilberts and the Jacksons truly integrated in Perth society, as equal and fully functioning members of the community, or were they regarded and indulged as exotic novelties? Rather than a few individuals or a single family, had a community of 50 Blacks established themselves at Perth, would race relations have been so cordial? The superficial evidence available could be read either way.

When the *Courier* announced the re-opening of John Jackson's business following the 1920 fire, the editor's comment that the new facilities would be found "*pleasing to John's many customers*", is striking. In keeping with the custom of the time, the *Courier* never referred to anyone by their given name only. Men were always referred to by their full name; in the form of their given name or initials, followed by their surname, or by their surname alone prefixed by 'Mr.'. Would it be reading too much into a single news item to ponder whether the use of Jackson's given name alone signified a slip-up arising from a close personal relationship between Jackson and the *Courier* editor, or that it signified the *Courier* editor did not think of John Jackson as of quite the same status, and as worthy of the same respect, as the rest of Perth's male cohort?

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<sup>125</sup> This small contingent of Blacks were not the only non-Caucasians among the Perth population in the period. In 1899, six Chinese men arrived in Perth, members of the Lung (Hamilton) and Fong (Johnston) families. They engaged in the laundry and café business. It may also be assumed there were also a few individuals of First Nations descent living within the municipality from time to time. The 1861 census also records Black yeoman Anson Harison (42), with his White wife, Mary (40), and Mulatto children William (10), Charlot (8), George A. (6), Anis T. (4) and Mary (1), all born in Upper Canada, resident in Burgess Township, as well as a Black laborer John Rolester and his Black wife Julia (24) Rolester, both born in the U.S.A., resident in Ramsay Township.

<sup>126</sup> Bathurst, Drummond, North Burgess and North Elmsley.

<sup>127</sup> The time period encompassed two stages of emigration from Lanark County; the first to Western Ontario and the American Midwest from the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century and then to Manitoba and the Canadian Northwest Territories (Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta) in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

George Gilbert, and his mother, are recorded in census records as 'Mulatto', so he and his children (of a White mother) may likely have been of very light complexion ('high yellow'), and thus did not 'stand out' as much as Blacks of darker complexion. That is not to suggest, however, that they made any attempt to 'pass' (as White) because, as the census, *Courier* reporting and other records show, they clearly did not. John Jackson and his wife Eliza seem to have been of darker complexion.

As barbers, Edward H. Brown, George Gilbert and John Jackson would have quickly become known by almost everyone in such a small community; both men and women, as they cut or dressed male, female and children's hair. In the period men also spent many hours hanging around the local barber shop; the best source of local news and gossip when the grog shop was closed. Although we know little of Eliza Jackson's life, Caroline Gilbert operated a seamstress shop, which would have put her in daily contact with a wide cross-section of Perth's citizens as well. Of course, Caroline Gilbert was herself White, but once people came to know Brown and the Gilberts and Jacksons, they appear to have soon realized their Black neighbors were pretty much like everyone else. Racism is always about ignorance and fear of the 'unknown other' and seldom survives close personal acquaintance. In a small town like Perth, it was impossible for the Gilberts and Jacksons to remain unknown.

It is worth noting that Black Sam was apparently an escaped slave, that Edward H. Brown's time in Perth spanned the years of Fugitive Slave Law and Dred Scott south of the border, that George Gilbert's sojourn at Perth encompassed the Civil War years (1861-1865), and John Jackson's time coincided with the failure of 'reconstruction' in the rebel states and the advent of Jim Crow.

The British Canadian colonies, and the people of Perth, were conflicted about slavery and race and the events those issues engendered in the United States. The majority were abolitionist while, at the same time, pro-Confederate. It was a widely-held opinion that, just as Blacks should be free, the southern states should also be free to govern themselves as they saw fit (even if the one view, utterly conflicted with the other). Opinion leaders in Perth were very 'British' in outlook and Britain was anti-Union because the Union naval blockade of southern ports cut off supplies of raw cotton to British mills causing a serious economic down-turn, unemployment and social unrest in the United Kingdom. How all of this may have shaped local attitudes toward an escaped slave or the free-born Black Americans living in their midst is, however, impossible to say.

Sam, Edward, George and John were not invited to join any of the local lodges, and Caroline and Eliza were never invited for tea at Matheson House or Victoria Hall, but while they lived within their social strata, they were not racially segregated or ostracized. The Gilberts participated in such local events as the Agricultural Society Fair, where they were frequently awarded prizes for their entries. John Jackson was a member of both the Perth Cricket Club and the Perth Brass Band, and once served on a grand jury. When Gilbert was involved in an altercation with a White man, the magistrate found in his favor and then, on appeal, a local jury upheld that ruling. The incident demonstrates that a White Magistrate and an all White jury were prepared to accept the testimony of a Black man over that of a White.

Brown and Gilbert were, sequentially, more-or-less the only barbers in town for a decade each; if they were not welcome and well regarded, more successful competition would surely have materialized and supplanted them. Even when such competition did arrive, it proved ineffective and shortly abandoned the barbering field to Gilbert. In Jackson's time, other barbers also set up shop in Perth, but the rapid demise of all but one of those also indicates no rush to his White competitors. When fire threatened his shop, his fellow main-streeters and friends rushed to help save its contents and his livelihood. Jackson maintained sufficient trade to make a living until ill health forced his retirement at the age of 72 years.

One might also imagine that local lads and lasses would not have lined up to marry the Gilbert's 'colored' children, but George Jr. married a White girl from the local area and they made a life for themselves in Almonte, another small Ottawa Valley town.

If Reverend Wilkinson is to be believed, after Jackson lost his wife, someone, "*for many years*", ensured that he "*never had to worry about his Christmas dinner*" and, although consigned in his old age to the Lanark County House of Industry, visits by Perthites (although probably church women delegated to the job) "*made him realize he had not been forgotten in his last days*". There is no reason that Wilkinson should not be taken at his word that Jackson indeed recounted, and expressed his appreciation for, the manner in which the community had supported him during his working life and saw to his welfare in old age.

However self-congratulatory and perhaps condescending the remarks of Reverend Wilkinson at Jackson's funeral might sound today, the "*large number of citizens*" who attended the funeral, and the status of the men who came forward to carry him on his last journey, can only be seen as a mark of respect and affection. The mayor, deputy mayor, school principals, lawyers and leading businessmen of Perth do not, then or now, turn out to serve as pallbearers for the average citizen except as a mark of respect and close friendship.

In the final analysis, the preponderance of available evidence tends toward granting the citizens of Perth the benefit of any doubt. Black Sam was mocked in false election advertisements and wound up in jail, but whatever daily slights Edward Brown, the Gilberts and Jacksons may have suffered, and there were no doubt many, they were minor enough to go unrecorded. With the possible exception of Black Sam, Perth's first Black citizens seem to have successfully integrated and put down roots in the town. Black Sam and Edward Brown both lived at Perth for nearly a decade. The Gilberts resided at Perth for 15 years and became parents to five children born locally. John Jackson lived and worked in Perth for more than half a century.

- Ron W. Shaw (2017, Updated 2025)

The author acknowledges with appreciation the assistance of - Stewart Blair, Janet Coward, Callie Gilbert, Eric Halpin, Michael Jaques, Brent McLaren, Eamonn O'Keeffe, Karen Prytula, Patrick Reynolds, Debbie Sproule and Jim Winton. Responsibility for all errors of fact or interpretation, however, lie entirely with the author.